





NORBERT SCHLÄBITZ 2016-02-15

BIDDING FAREWELL TO THE GREAT HISTORY OF MUSIC

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In the following you will read a story about the change in music. One can certainly tell various stories, but certainly also this one that I have in mind. People could describe this story as tragic, because since music once found its place at the unchallenged gods of art it has to prove itself worthy today. I do, however, believe that this story incorporates a happy end, even if memorials can no longer be certain of their appreciation.

However, to start with, there is a problem. To report on the changes in music, the question arises immediately: does any such thing as the music actually exist? And if not, and I am convinced that there is no such thing as the music, which music am I then to report on? Hence, music only exists in plural!

Writing these these introductory phrases, I am already way into the topic. Eighty years ago a story regarding the change in music would have been presented to you without those preliminary considerations. Back then people strongly believed that with all the music that was out there, there was only one specific direction in music that was solely worth reporting on.

This conviction has been profoundly disrupted today. And even those who are still of that opinion, should no longer feel safe to expect general approval. They will have to anticipate encountering opposition.

My classification of the change in music comprises of five points. They are:
"Continuity, instead of change"
"From the Kunstreligion (religion of art) to worldly music"
"From 'work piece' to 'piece work'"
"Beyond all interests"
"In the focus of the media. About the change of attention"

Continuity instead of change

The overall environment in 1945 is characterised by ruins. Stockhausen said: "The cities have been destroyed." His conclusion was to take this as an opportunity and start from scratch, regardless of the ruins. This sounds full of confidence, yet things are not that simple because, following the War, some musicians prefer continuity rather than a new beginning. Hence, there can be no such

things as referring to "change in music" or a new beginning. How is this continuity expressed? There can be no doubt that Karajan, who decided to join the NSDAP twice, was a part of continuity, as he believed it was beneficial to his commencing career. He joined the NSDAP in Austria first and then again in Germany, just to be on the safe side. This arrangement with the rulers subsequently really did not develop into any disadvantage to him.

Furtwängler or Richard Strauss also arranged themselves with the reigning system. Carl Orff and Werner Egk saw themselves even more deeply entrapped in the system with their own compositions. For everyone who presented their art within the restraints of the murderous reigning circumstances, the rule that applied was, as written by Hans Werner Heister, "saving one's own privileges or even expanding these."1

If you asked the composers, musicians or conductors after the war about their function within the system, you would find yourself in an entirely unpolitical camp. That some musicians, composers, conductors used their music, their concerts, and even their writings to stabilise the system, would be denied. Carl Orff for example, who courted the Third Empire with his commissioned works ("Arian Midsummer Night's Dream), even finds that he actually was an ally to the opposition. However, there were also those, such as the composer Hans Pfitzner who, following the War, frequently found words in defence of the genocide, and as such positioned himself on the sidelines.2

The reason it was so easy for numerous artists to arrange themselves with National Socialism was because the cultural system of values of the educated elite did not even vary so greatly to those of the National Socialists. Numerous recent studies draw attention to this.3 One merely has to think about the super-elevation of the artists to icons of German culture or the idea of classical music as timeless music. Quite generally, the art-aesthetic ideals of the bourgeoisie were commensurate with the fascist ideology. Until deep into the bomb war, the National Socialists promoted the musical inheritance of Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and others. With this promotion, one confronted the "Modern", with its expressive art and, simultaneously, was developing the role models for the Third Empire.

As sad as this may be: especially the educated middle-class, and as such also numerous artists, felt attracted to the demon that was prevailing in the first half of the 20th century. In his book "Kultur und Politik" (Culture and Politics) Wolf Lepenies writes about this topic: "Initially the fascism and the National Socialism had an aesthetic appeal for large parts of the intelligence and the bourgeoisie, which is barely comprehensible today."4 Wide sections of the German educated middle-class understood as Stefan Rebenich says the "political turmoil of 1933 to be idealising, as a true recovery of the German political life."5

Musicologists such as Heinrich Besseler, Joseph Müller-Blattau, Hans Joachim Moser or Friedrich Blume provided the apparently professional and yet only nationalistic background music. Subsequently, their activities during the Third Empire neither harmed them, nor the musicians to any significant extent. Insofar, one can speak about unbroken continuity. A major share of the music that was popular during fascism was as popular later on. The majority of the artists, musicians and scientists who were active during fascism, continued their careers in the subsequent Federal Republic. The music did not have a detrimental effect. It cannot defend itself; it is used for whatever purposes deemed worthy at the time. To which extent it is detrimental for the persons mentioned, or also for the musicology itself; this is an entirely different question.

A Change after all: From the religion of art to worldly music

When one speaks of the concept of great and timeless masterpieces, the understanding of art, which carried on after WWII, really signifies continuity rather than a change or new beginning. Everything actually continued as before, but just under a different political sign.

However, even with all this continuity, music and the arts in general were damaged and this on an ideological level. The belief in the ethical additional value was thrown into doubt, along with the belief that a kind of religion could be found in music and art, or the belief that interaction with music or art has a positive influence on people. Adorno expressed this by saying that the aesthetic forms "[were] lies reproved by the disaster of the society from which they emerged."6

The great music and literature critic, Joachim Kaiser, had in fact written about this a few years earlier: the "constant occupation with culture does not necessarily improve people. There was apparently an Obersturmbannführer at Auschwitz who listened to Bach. I rather fear that anyone who is excessively cultured and sensitive to wonderful things and who realises most of his or her being through such things, probably releases those dark and sinister facets – which also are an aspect of being human – even more intensively and without restraint in their private lives."7

Traditional music hereby loses its ideological foundation and its status of a religion of art. The aesthetic upbringing through art, of which Schiller was so convinced, really finished itself off through the events in the 20th century and was ultimately proven to be but a dream. Even today, the history of the additional value of art is still told in which aesthetic catharsis plays its part, but it no longer convinces. It has unfortunately been empirically refuted in a cruel way. Art has been given adhesion and this can be described as a fulminant change.

From the "work-piece" to "piece-work"

After the war and liberation there was also a new start, a return to contemporary music and particularly to Schönberg and Hindemith. This was linked to the New Music. This new beginning attempted to build on the expressive art of the pre-war period

and promoted a new avant-garde. Artistically, this was a very fruitful time.

The question of what music is, has to be reconsidered. Initially linked to composition with twelve tones, it very gradually expanded the sound spectrum. Until well into the 20th century, it was actually quite clear what music was. Music was organised sound, occasionally, it was also improvised sound, which also took place within the environment of structured sound events. There was a musical form against a noisy background. Work was carried out on the form and the background was neglected. This changed.

It is new but linked with preceding idea providers. Even a composer such as Erik Satie questioned the separation of form and background with his "musique d'ameublement" at the end of the 19th century. As early as the start of the 20th century, Busoni drafted a "New aesthetics of music," which expanded the tonal space. Futurism and Luigi Russolo also rethought music and found that sound can be music. And "musique concrete" after the war finally no longer pursued this separation of form and background. But since Cage at the latest, this separation no longer exists. Even electronic music with Stockhausen sought to generate sound events beyond the usual.

Everything is music or can be music. Thus post-war music follows new paths and does so also in Germany again. The problem here is: where everything can now be music, you cannot speak of direction any more. Work on the once recognised form gives way for the formation of diverse sound events. A differentiation and pluralisation of the sound spectrum are the result.

Another problem that enriches the world of sound with an endless range of sound stories is the following: an increasing individualisation of music takes shape. This means that composers invent their music without reference to a common profile of ideas. Everything now depends on composers' "private philosophies", as the music critic Jungheinrich writes. One composer writes one kind of music, another something else, and no direction is the "right" one any more. The result is a amplitude of new music. This is a fundamental change.

With this change not only the spectrum of music changes. The idea of a "history of music" essentially ended with this new opinion of music. In the 19th century, the Romantic invented the development history of music. The view was aimed at a distant past, from which culture goes its way. The development history organically derived 12-tone music from the great forms of the 19th century and from this, serial music, ended with the dissolution of form and background and with individual composition techniques. Everyone tells their own small story for themselves, which has little to do with any others. Of course, there are alliances, and at times, also the opinion leadership of a few composers, but this also came to an end as the 20th century progressed. There is no binding benchmark anymore.

The era of the great works, once written and established, is over. In the 60s, Dieter Schnebel expressed this with the words that the change from the "work-piece" to the "piece-work" had been completed. "Piece-work" does not sound particularly noble, timeless or universal, but it hits the nail on the head.

Thus art has also moved from the sunlit heights to close to the ground at this level. But with its secularisation unfolds almost automatically a revaluation of the person that cultivates the music or listens to it.

Beyond all interests

I would like to report on a last problem, which I call the change in attention. After the Second World War, the path to a new music was followed. This new music, e.g. the so-called holiday courses in Darmstadt, were subsidised to 100% subsidised at this time. What was meant to be an aid became, with all the enhanced musical results, also a problem. Artists do not make it easy for their audience. Now, every incentive to take the audience with them is lacking. At times, it is deemed to be a sign of particular progressiveness not to be listened to or understood by an audience anyway. My conclusion is that new music is damaged by this, because the result is not only music made largely without an audience, it is music that very gradually disappears from public perception.

Therefore, the avant-garde cares more about itself than about an audience. The music of the avant-garde is, not without reason, described as merely a niche culture by the composer and philosopher, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf. "Ultimately, new music, unable to participate in the cultural discourse, has connected to a monad of an auto-referential sub-system processing itself, and is subject to its neuroses there without an external therapeutic contact." And he inferred: "The end of 'new' music is clear: its system will collapse without the public registering this."8 The audience prefers to turn to other forms of music.

Classical music, from which new music differentiated itself after the war, also has an attention problem. Once undisputed, untouchable as high culture, it now has to prove itself in an increasingly larger market. Records, later CDs and today data files, are, as the media for music, cheap and exploit it. In a market that values musical change, classical music has the problem that it always intends to record and sell the same music. There are more than 1500 versions of Beethoven's Fifth on sale at amazon.

The problem can be put into figures. For example, Abbado's inaugural recording of Brahms' First Symphony sold only 3,000 copies in the USA in five years. But in order to move into profit, 50,000 would have had to have been sold. "The break-even point would never be reached, not before the Second Coming of Christ," writes Norman Lebrecht. One Deutsche Grammophon Abbado edition sold as few as 60 copies. Norman Lebrecht, who identified these data, added: "Muti, the antipode of Abbado, did not have it any better. Two of his Verdi operas at Sony didn't even reach sales in four figures. Simon Rattle's Sibelius, published at EMI, managed a circulation of 2,000 for the Second and Fifth Symphony and a few hundred for the others. Haitink's Mahler's

Seventh Symphony trickled by with total sales of four hundred in eighteen months. Barenboim added up to six hundred for a Bruckner's Third Symphony."9

Solo artists too, such as a Rolando Villazón, perform through the media and, despite all the playacting for which they sometimes stand, find it difficult to deliver something to the public so that their albums sell halfway decently. If it goes well, he sells around 50,000 copies. Anyone else with a name and standing sells only half as many. In view of the production costs, such recordings hardly pay their way or not at all.
The consequence is the big majors only record classical music in exceptions. Sony's boss once described this with the words that there simply were not any new melodies in the classical sector anymore, and the others had already been recorded much too often.

But conductors make unstinting efforts to find a solvent producer for their version of Beethoven. Despite this, concert life finds it difficult to open itself up to new forms of reception that put the music of tradition in a contemporary connection. Lachenmann once strongly criticised the maintenance of the status quo: "It [cultural business; note N.S.] preserves the illusion of a common understanding, which in reality has long been lost, by conserving and making a fetish of historic aesthetic categories and moral concepts associated with this."10

Therefore, a fundamental change in attention can be observed. The music of tradition and new music find it ever more difficult to state their claims. They are falling out of the focus of general musical interest.

Media Focus: A Change in Awareness

There is another change which must be mentioned. This is not least a consequence of the mass media which has played an increasingly significant role since WWII. The distribution of music via different platforms has changed our attitude to music itself. The socialisation of young people now also occurs via the medium of the mass media. Radio was quickly followed by television and today we can add computers and the internet to the list. In a world of media, young people are increasingly less likely to take on the likes of their parents; they discover their own music. Conventional education is losing sight, as is the avant garde which is paid little attention to in public anymore.

Young people choose their own musical history, which is often at odds with that of their parents and their likes and dislikes. Where tradition does live on, it is no longer binding in the way it once was. The catchword that determines socialisation today is plurality in all areas of life. Young people are becoming increasingly detached from their own traditions, listening to music from other continents and following trends. Their own cultural background is no longer their only background; other ones appear.

This has been expressed in the success story of popular music. Following WWII, popular music experienced a boom. First Rock 'n' Roll culture, then The Beatles and the Rolling Stones — these are important influences which have shunted classical and even 20th century classical music into second place and which threaten their leadership in musical matters. The result: there is no longer such a thing as 'music' but rather multiple 'musics'. The listener decides which type of music suits him. It is no longer culturally predetermined.

Popular musical artists in turn consider traditional music to be a big box of treasures that they can use for their own music. I would like to point to one example of this: the group Kraftwerk expressly makes references to Stockhausen's legacy. Futurism has also provided the band with many ideas. And other bands, such as Coldplay, have been inspired by Kraftwerk, etc. One could almost say that traditional music and 20th century classical music are finding popularity and listeners again through the medium of popular music.

The arts are coalescing through mass media. Adorno recognised this in the 60s when he spoke of the 'Fragmentation of the Arts' in the course of happenings and the Fluxus movement. Digitalisation has brought about another huge leap where everything – images, tone, and text — can be combined arbitrarily. Music, which even considers the silent backdrop of a cage, has become suitable for mass use via the electronic music sampler.

With the rise of mass media and popular music the unstoppable decline or fall of the German musicology is connected. The problem: Essentially she furthermore looks back and writes more stories about the music of the past, losing the music of the presence from the view. Ignoring the presence of the music, she loses increasingly the competence to make relevant statements concerning the current music. The consequence: the decline up to the almost complete insignificance today.

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I would like to illustrate the change in music I describe with a diagram. You could perhaps say the first half of the 20th century saw the world of music inspired by a mission, a search in the same vein as Hegel's 'Absolute Spirit'. Every type of music on the way there was a stage with its aim sketched out. In this context, Sloterdijk speaks of the 'Point' principle.11 Everything is geared towards this target. Many developments seem necessary, other developments do not. Going beyond the past by means of the musical present is imperative. Phases of music are strung in time like a string of pearls. A return to the old ways seems unthinkable. This is expressed particularly in great works which appear to be full stops in themselves but which are only temporary. These works are clearly outlined, completed in a book and therefore manifest. And there are selected people,

composers, who have a sense for the right path for music. It is undoubtedly a teleological model that I'm describing. It is within the context of the idea of a kind of religion ("Kunstreligion"). Today, this model seems passé.

The target has vanished. The past and the present can be combined without hesitation. Teleology has served its time. Sloterdijk calls this principle, which has also fallen to the wayside due to technological media, the 'Nodal Point'.12 What counts is not the distant target but the path to it and the moment, the momentary combination of the two. Music is only a temporary phenomenon, constructed and contingent. In other words, it could be different. The coincidence, the momentary decision that meant it occurred one way and not the other. The musical histories arranged at first on the string of pearls now lie happily mixed together before the shapers of music who help themselves to what suits them. We are part of a world which is taking leave of ontological ideas. And creators of music are seeing themselves less as composers and more as navigators in a stream of data. Digitalisation, it would appear, makes change constitutive.

This change in music is also a result of new technological possibilities: the end of musical history, the expansion of sound spaces, which knows no goals, leads to, thanks to technological media, entirely new sound histories, the combination of old and new, the abolition of origins. Finally, I would like to leave you with an example: Look to Robin Skouteris project Moonlight hotel. The present example that is called "mashup" includes, among other artists and other music, Beethoven, Madonna, Maria Callas and The Eagles. This is coupled with the picture. The 'Fragmentation of the Arts' that Adorno described is now the standard. There is no debate about whether anyone likes this development. It is interesting to note that, in the digital cyberspace, everything is the present. And everything moves on the same level. There is no feature anymore that could distinguish between more demanding or less demanding music . Even more: What exactly is art and what is not, is no longer to be defined. The musical art form of „mashup" shows the inspiring consequences of this development. Some critics see this phenomenon as a sign of cultural „apocalypse", i.e. the destruction of our culture, while others claim it indicates real inspiration for a new and exciting kind of art.

I am not concerned about the future of music, where everything can be combined with everything else. The end of musical history has seen the paths of music multiply. It moves; it is constantly changing. One must be prepared for surprises.

Footnotes

1. (Original in German: „die eigenen Privilegien und Positionen retten oder sogar ausbauen.") Heister, Hans-Werner: Maskierung und Mobilisierung. Zur Rolle von Musik und Musiker im Nazismus. In: Sarkowicz, Hans (Hg.): Hitlers Künstler. Die Kultur im Dienst des Nationalsozialismus. Frankfurt/M./Leipzig (Insel) 2004, S. 317.
2. Ibid.
3. For example: Martynkewicz, Wolfgang: Salon Deutschland. Geist und Macht 1900 – 1945. Berlin (Aufbau) 2009.
4. Lepenies, Wolf: Kultur und Politik. Frankfurt/M. (Fischer) 2008, S. 110. German original: „Zunächst der Faschismus und dann der Nationalsozialismus übten auf große Teile der Intelligenz und des Bürgertums eine ästhetische Anziehungskraft aus, die heute schwer nachvollziehbar ist."
5. Rebenich, Stefan: Die Mommsens. In: Volker Reinhardt (Hg.): Deutsche Familien. Historische Portraits von Bismarck bis Weizäcker. München (dtv) 2010, S. 164. German original: „den politischen Umbruch von 1933 idealisierend als ‚eine wirkliche Gesundung des deutschen Staatslebens'"
6. (Original in German: „Lügen gestraft [worden] von der Katastrophe jener Gesellschaft, aus der sie hervorgingen.") Adorno, Theodor W.: Auferstehung der Kultur in Deutschland? In: ders.: Kritik. Kleine Schriften zur Gesellschaft. Frankfurt/M. (Suhrkamp) 1971, S. 27.
7. (Original in German: „Den Obersturmbannführer, der in Auschwitz Bach hörte, soll es schließlich gegeben haben. Ich fürchte sogar, dass jemand, der über die Maßen kultiviert und sensibel für Schönes ist und darin einen großen Teil seines Menschseins verwirklicht, möglicherweise im Privatleben jene dunklen und schmutzigen Seiten, die auch zum Menschen gehören, umso heftiger und ungehemmter herauslässt.") Kaiser, Joachim/Kaiser, Henriette: „Ich bin der letzte Mohikaner". Berlin (Ullstein) 2008, S. 229.
8. (Original in German: „Die Neue Musik schließlich, unfähig der Partizipation am kulturellen Diskurs, hat sich zu einer Monade eines autoreferentiell sich selbst abwickelnden Subsystems abgeschlossen und ist dort ihren Neurosen ohne therapeutischen Außenkontakt ausgesetzt." „Das Ende der ‚neuen' Musik ist offenkundig: Ihr System bricht zusammen, ohne daß die Öffentlichkeit dies registriert".) Mahnkopf, Claus-Steffen: Kritische Theorie der Musik. Weilerswist (Velbrück) 2006, S. 81.
9. (Original in German: „Der Break-even-Punkt würde nicht erreicht werden, nicht vor der Wiederkunft Christi." „Muti, dem Antipoden von Abbado, ging es nicht besser. Zwei seiner Verdi-Opern bei Sony erreichten nicht einmal vierstellige Verkaufszahlen. Simon Rattles Sibelius, bei EMI erschienen, schaffte eine Auflage von 2000 für die Zweite und die Fünfte Symphonie und einige hundert für die übrigen. Haitinks Siebte Symphonie von Mahler tröpfelte in achtzehn Monaten mit einer Verkaufszahl von insgesamt vierhundert vor sich hin. Barenboim zählte sechshundert bei einer Dritten Symphonie von Bruckner.") Lebrecht, Norman: Ausgespielt. Aufstieg und Fall der Klassikindustrie. Mainz (Schott) 2007, S. 171.
10. (Original in German: „Die Illusion einer in Wirklichkeit längst verlorenen gemeinsamen Verständigungsbasis bewahrt er [der Kulturbetrieb; Anm. N.S.] durch die Konservierung und Fetischisierung historischer ästhetischer Kategorien und daran gebundener Wertvorstellungen.") Lachenmann, Helmut: Über Tradition. In: ders.: Musik als existenzielle Erfahrung. Schriften 1966-1995. Wiesbaden 1996, S. 339.
11. Sloterdijk, Peter: Medienzeit. Stuttgart (Cantz) 1993, S. 59.
12. Ibid.